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GERMAN DEFENSE POLICY AT A TURNING POINT?

by

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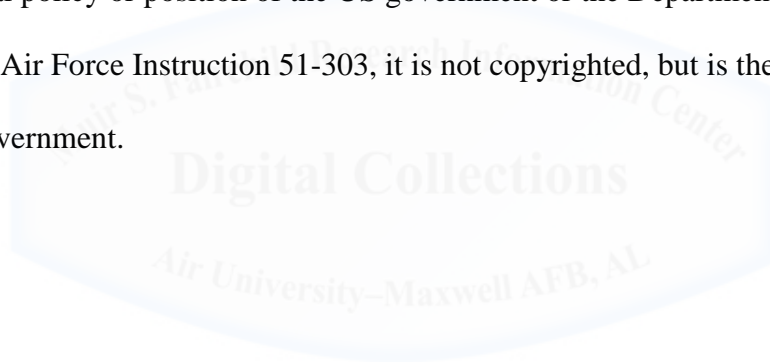
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Abstract

Since 2001 there has been a sense of malaise within European defense and foreign policy intellectual circles on both sides of the Atlantic, who have questioned Germany's "status-quo orientation" that relies on a culture of "military restraint....as an excuse for not contributing to international missions."¹ Due to a confluence of factors, conditions are ripe for a fundamental shift in Germany's national security posture as they re-evaluate their foreign policy and relationship with NATO and the European Union (EU).

The following will examine the major historical events underlying Germany's unique national security posture, to assert that major changes in the German foreign policy are unlikely due to; (1) strength of the civilian power paradigm that seeks broad consensus and does not permit the government to employ the military absent a parliamentary mandate, (2) the population's lack of will to support military interventions or fund a German defense force, and (3) the small size and funding level of the Bundeswehr. The following brief discussion of specific eras and conflicts will set the stage for this assertion with specific focus placed on the 2011 German abstention on the United Nations resolution to intervene militarily in Libya.

Introduction

In the decades since the end of World War II, Germany has evolved a unique perspective on issues of national and regional security and the stability of the global order shaped largely by Germany's role in the major World Wars of the first half of the 20th century. Despite a culture that values "military restraint"² Germany contributed military forces to several North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operations in the 1990s, but since 2001 there has been a sense of malaise within European defense and foreign policy intellectual circles on both sides of the Atlantic, who have questioned Germany's "status-quo orientation" that relies on this culture of "military restraint....as an excuse for not contributing to international missions."³ Due to a confluence of factors, including recent statements from German political leaders in support of a more assertive use of the German military, international criticism following their abstention from the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya, and Russia's recent incursion into Crimea, conditions are ripe for a fundamental shift in Germany's national security posture as they re-evaluate their foreign policy and relationship with NATO and the European Union (EU).

The following will examine the major historical events underlying Germany's unique national security posture, one characterized by beliefs and values that include a "deep skepticism about the appropriateness and utility of military force, a preference for multilateral action, a drive to be viewed as a reliable partner, and a strong aversion to assuming a leadership role in international security affairs"⁴, evaluating how these traits, and the underlying German geopolitical calculus, have shaped the nation's decisions to employ their military since the end of World War II. These events and subsequent analysis will be used to support an assertion that major changes in the German orientation to using military force outside their borders are unlikely in the near term due to three primary factors; (1) the institutional strength of the civilian power

paradigm that seeks broad consensus and does not permit the government to employ the military absent a mandate from the parliament, (2) the German population's lack of will to support military interventions or fund a larger German defense force that would be necessary for a more assertive national defense policy, and (3) the small size and funding level of the Bundeswehr (German military), with minimal prospects for additional funding in the near term. The following brief discussion of specific eras and conflicts will set the stage for this assertion with specific focus placed on the 2011 German abstention on the United Nations Security Council's Resolution (UNSCR) to intervene in Libya, and Germany's recent response to the Russian incursion into Crimea.

Historical Basis for the German Perspective

The post-War era will be briefly discussed followed by a survey of the major conflicts and foreign policy decisions that illustrate the German approach to utilizing their defense forces in pursuit of regional or international stability. Following this survey of the major events that have shaped German defense policy, there is an expanded discussion of the German decision to not participate in the Libyan intervention in 2011. The focus will shift to recent comments by prominent German officials asserting that German foreign and defense policies must be reevaluated in light of declining US influence, and Germany's vested interest in maintaining the status quo of the global security paradigm.

Allies Post-War Re-Structuring of Europe

In February, 1945 the Allied Powers agreed at the Yalta summit on a European geopolitical landscape that they hoped would re-define (and in some cases re-align) the national interests of key European nations in an attempt to stabilize the balance of power on the continent for generations to come. This "Europe of Yalta", as the Allies envisioned it, was defined "by five

unique characteristics; the decisive role of the superpowers in European affairs, the creation of two military-political alliance systems (NATO and Warsaw Pact), the division of Germany, nuclear deterrence, and the existence of a small group of neutral and non-aligned countries.”⁵ As the relationship between the western Allies and the Soviet Union began to sour shortly after the war’s end, the division of greater Germany and Berlin into four occupation zones began to symbolize “the front line of the respective military-ideological blocs,”⁶ with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) formed in western Germany and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) formed in the east. “The fact that the division of Europe ran directly through the heart of Germany was of tremendous political and symbolic significance for the subsequent dynamics of the cold war”⁷, and for the development of a German zeitgeist that came to embrace the civilianization of society.

Accordingly, in the early 1950s, West Germany eschewed a well-equipped and modern military force, and was shaped by a civilianization of their society resulting in a culture that viewed military power suspiciously following the decades of nationalist conflict that started the 20th century. During most of the second half of the 20th century, West German foreign policy was shaped by an isolationist orientation that valued multilateral solutions to conflict. This orientation kept the German military small and left civilian policy makers little inclination to project military power outside German and, most certainly, European borders.

The Cold War Era

The Cold War-era saw East and West Germany strengthen their respective relationships with each of their benefactors. Throughout the Cold War, “the strategy of the West depended upon the geomilitary advantage provided by German territory,” while West Germany “not only received protection by the members of the NATO alliance, but also secured the dignity ascribed

to a free and independent state, and the continuous help toward reunification by peaceful means.”⁸ West Germany “quickly matured into a stable liberal democracy with a social market economy and a flourishing civil society”, frequently viewed in geopolitical terms as an “economic giant but a political pygmy...with a political character marked by a culture of modesty and reserve.”⁹ The East German economy stagnated under the auspices of the Soviet Union, but within ten years of the end of the war, the West German economy “had outdistanced all the victors of World War II except the United States and the Soviet Union.”¹⁰

While West Germany’s economy flourished, “the greatest problem for the Allies, who had organized themselves to face the possible onslaught of the Soviets, was how to obtain the use of German military power without reviving its militaristic adventurism.”¹¹ Rearmament was not popular in West Germany, but the Western plan for the strategic defense of Europe required German rearmament.¹² The plan to re-arm was opposed by France and, not surprisingly, the Soviet Union, but steady four party (United States, Britain, France, and Soviet Union) diplomacy between 1947 and 1955 established “the Federal Republic of Germany, the settlement of the Berlin blockade...gaining of West German sovereignty, and her admission to NATO,”¹³ in addition to a plan for a robust West German rearmament that played a central role in balancing the Soviet power in the region for decades to come.

Ostpolitik Realized

The era of Cold War bi-polarity ended relatively suddenly in the late 1980s “with the coming of power of a reformist leadership around Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow in 1985,” this set the stage for the collapse of the ‘Europe of Yalta’ and a change of epochs in European order.”¹⁴ German unification followed and “it was one of the most important – and for many, unexpected – developments in late twentieth-century Europe.”¹⁵ Following its re-unification in

1990, Germany completed its emergence as the “dominant structural power in Europe, with a troubled past, a potent economy, sophisticated diplomatic skills, and considerable potential for shaping developments in Central and Eastern Europe.”¹⁶ This era marked the re-orientation of German defense policy as the nation shifted from two states aligned along an East-West orientation to one nation bridging the interests of Western-aligned neighbors and the former satellite states of the USSR to the east.

Again, One Germany

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification, Germany’s political climate and security orientation began to change as the nation developed a more mature and sovereign approach to foreign policy. At the risk of oversimplifying, it is not a stretch to say that “before 1990 (West) German foreign policy was derived from a conceptual framework with two fixed points of reference: a past to overcome, and a future to be achieved”, the problem being that the “second point of reference vanished with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact.”¹⁷ Thus began a relatively rapid but subtle change in the orientation of German security posture, as United States security guarantees faded in importance.

Despite the meteoric rise of their economy, and their increasing interdependence on the European Union (EU), the German attitude towards foreign policy and NATO frequently seemed indifferent in the years immediately following the re-unification of Germany. This was a turbulent time with the public and policy makers debating the future role of Germany in Europe and “the future of German grand strategy.”¹⁸ Reflecting on the 1990s, two major events significantly drove the often strained domestic dialogue on German obligations on the world stage; “the Gulf war, and the war in Yugoslavia” because “both events exposed a role conflict at the heart of German foreign and security policy.”¹⁹ These two issues helped usher in the “great

foreign policy debate in Germany” that raised “highly charged issues” like “is there a German national interest, and if so, what does it consist of?”²⁰

The Gulf War had less of an impact on this internal dialogue than the war in the Baltics because it occurred as the final draft of the Two Plus Four Agreement was being assembled, and just prior to the formal re-unification of Germany. In the months after the re-unification was finalized, and before the Gulf War started, Germany made the difficult decision to abstain from the conflict, balancing two competing concerns in the process: (1) “the expectation of the international community that Germany would assume international responsibilities commensurate with the more powerful position that the united Germany occupied in the international arena since unification”, and (2) “the opposite impulse for Germany to avoid any appearance of a triumphant grand entrance onto the world stage.”²¹ Germany opted for “check-book diplomacy” and an 18 billion DM contribution to the cost of the military intervention.²²

Hyde-Price (2000) makes several excellent points about the central nature of the national dialogue during this era immediately after re-unification. He explains that the argument in Germany from 1990 to about 1995 was about “normalization”, or more accurately, what defines “normalcy...for a country with a past legacy of genocide?”²³ Was it “normal” to “act in a more self-confident manner within multilateral structures...taking greater responsibility for achieving policy objectives shared by the wider international community”, or was this type of “normal” behavior “the very antithesis of a civilian power?”²⁴ Differences in what defines “normal” lie at the heart of the German foreign policy debate on the role of military force; is it “normal” to “strive for great power status and the use of deliberative military power”; or is it being “whole, free, stable, self-reliant, and trusted with power”, that defines “normal.”²⁵ It can be argued that this has been the central argument defining German policy debates for 25 years.

In discussing “the question of Germany’s normalizing ambitions”, Chaya Arora (2006) describes three important developments that have “added to assumptions of greater normalcy in German foreign policy.”²⁶ The first was the inauguration of “a new Red-Green government in September 1998”, representing a generational change in the nation’s political leadership that would presumably feel less constrained than their Konrad Adenauer-era predecessors by the burdens of the nation’s history of militaristic conquest in the early 20th century. The second normalizing development was the Bundestag’s decision in 1991 to move the German capital from Bonn to Berlin. Many felt that “with Berlin much closer to the dynamic transition economies of East Central Europe than Bonn, gradual political-cultural changes in Germany’s foreign policy outlook were to be expected.”²⁷ The third, and most significant sign of the maturation of German foreign defense and security policy, was the nation’s “decision to participate in NATO’s air war over Kosovo in March 1999.”²⁸

War in Kosovo; A Turning Point?

Following the Gulf War, “the crucial and critical test for the civilian power paradigm came with the wars of independence and the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia.”²⁹ The 1995 massacre of civilians at Srebrenica forced the German public and politicians to confront “the contradiction between the slogans ‘never again war, and never again Auschwitz’”.³⁰ The ‘history argument’ began to take shape as political parties and the public discussed whether or not Germany’s unique history bestowed an obligation to prevent similar “gross human rights abuses, at least in Europe.”³¹ This debate was summarized by former Defense Minister Volker Ruhe, who observed that “there are examples in history that show that it can be immoral to use soldiers; in other situations, however, one has to say that it is deeply immoral to not use soldiers,

when it is the only chance to stop war and massacre”, an interpretation that was embraced by the coalition government and key members of the parliament.³²

After initially refusing to contribute to NATO interventions in the Balkans throughout the mid-1990s, the German position on using force in the Balkans eased in 1999 when Germany contributed military forces to the NATO campaign against Bosnian Serbs in Kosovo, Operation ALLIED FORCE. This was widely viewed as a watershed event in German foreign policy that ushered in a new era of foreign policy assertiveness that reflected a notable departure from Germany’s history as a “culture of restraint”.³³ The conflict highlighted five game-changing aspects of German foreign policy that re-defined the nation’s approach to multilateral relationships and regional security challenges: (1) it was the first use of German combat power since World War II, (2) it occurred in the Balkans, “a theatre where the burden of historical memory suggested German troops would never again be deployed, (3) the Schroder-Fischer governing party was from the Left and historically known to have very pacifist leanings, (4) it also set a precedent for German involvement in “peacekeeping operations” outside of NATO’s jurisdiction, and without a UN mandate, and (5) participation was “an open contravention to the terms of the Red-Green coalition agreement of October 1998, according to which the participation of German forces in measures to preserve international peace and security is bound by the observance to international law as well as Germany’s constitutional law.”³⁴

While these five factors shed light on the “what”, they do little to illuminate the larger role of the conflict in German policy circles or describe the “why” in a nation that essentially swore nine years earlier in the first Gulf War that they would not be co-opted by multilateral obligations to commit troops if they did not feel it was justified. Three related factors help explain why Germany supported combat actions against the Slobodan Milosevic’s Serbian forces

in Kosovo. The first was that the “governing coalition was regarded as inexperienced in foreign policy and sought to “confirm its foreign policy credibility...by demonstrating its loyalty toward the Alliance”, exemplifying Schroder’s sense that his country was obliged “support its partners without any ifs and buts...as a ‘normal’ ally—whether in the EU or NATO.”³⁵ The second factor that explains Germany’s participation in Kosovo in 1999 was the “moral imperative of putting an end to the human suffering endured by the Kosovars”, or the feeling that “never again war” could not bare more moral authority than “never again another Holocaust in Europe”.³⁶ Lastly, Germany was driven by a desire to support the international institutions that formed the cornerstone of the nation’s “multilateral foreign policy orientation”, while anxious to bolster the “credibility and effectiveness of NATO, the European Union and the United Nations.”³⁷ Many heralded Germany’s decision to participate in Operation ALLIED FORCE as the surest sign that “Germany was finally and once again evolving into a normal great power as self-confident as its Western partners and becoming equally assertive in its foreign policy behavior”³⁸, illustrating along the way that “military force was a necessary component of successful diplomacy.”³⁹ Another crisis ten years later would force policy elites on both sides of the Atlantic to renew this debate.

German Support of the War on Terror After 9/11

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, like many nations, the German government and citizenry expressed solidarity and empathy over the lives lost in the attacks. Shortly after the attack, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder vowed the “unrestricted solidarity” of the German people, evidenced by his rapid and unequivocal support for United States and British airstrikes against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Germany was dismayed to learn that Mohammed Atta and others had planned the 9/11 attacks under the guise of a religious student group on the

campus of the Technical University of Hamburg.⁴⁰ This discovery prompted a number of measures including the “revocation of the immunity of religious groups and charities from investigation or surveillance from authorities to be passed into law and increased funding for domestic security measures.

Much more difficult and nuanced was the German decision to contribute combat troops to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Chancellor Schroeder knew that his country would have to provide more than just symbolic or financial support as they had done during the first Gulf War, but was also very wary to “appear too eager to rush to war”.⁴¹ He was eventually able to broker the delicate political support required to send combat troops to Afghanistan despite his countrymen’s “uneasiness with regard to the use of force and a military commitment beyond German borders, even as part of a multi-lateral decision.”⁴²

While Germany (and other European nations) expressed unequivocal support for combat efforts in Afghanistan to capture Osama Bin Laden and dislodge the Taliban, many elites (then and now) believed that “Europe never accepted the premise that the fight against international terrorism was a war in its classical meaning.”⁴³ The prevailing view was that terrorism was more of a criminal threat, to be dealt with by the police, courts, and domestic intelligence networks, rather than the military.⁴⁴ The reluctance of the German population to commit force outside the nation’s borders will be discussed further later, but in this case it was tempered by Defense Minister Peter Struck’s comments that “after 9/11, the defense of Germany begins at the Hindu Kush”, a comment that chafed the general public and German media in 2001.⁴⁵ With that distinction made, and political support secured, Germany contributed almost 4,000 troops to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, but after the UNSC’s December 2001 creation of the International Security Assistance Force, Germany “insisted on keeping two separate mandates

for its forces in Afghanistan, one as part of ISAF under NATO command and one under Operation ENDURING FREEDOM command...deliberately emphasizing the difference between helping to maintain a secure environment for the Afghan government and the fight against international terrorism.”⁴⁶

Germany Says “No” to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

This fundamental difference regarding whether terrorism was best countered with combat troops or domestic law enforcement tools, was a crucial difference between the strategic approaches to combatting terrorism on both sides of the Atlantic, and one of the deep-rooted causes of dissent between the United States and several NATO allies prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 2003, Germany was a vocal opponent of the United States’ invasion of Iraq and Germany’s relationship with the United States was very strained for a number of years after Germany refused to contribute forces as part of the coalition of nations that overthrew the Iraqi government. This conflict between the United States and Germany on the decision to invade Iraq had roots that dated back to the fall of 2001, when German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer visited Washington and received assurances from President Bush that “nothing had been decided, and that, as a matter of course, the allies would be consulted before any decision would be made.”⁴⁷

It seemed to most that while “the United States has the physical and cultural means to wage war on terrorism...(for) Germany and most European countries, war is not a viable policy option for fighting terrorism.”⁴⁸ The political wrangling played out in ugly and nationalistic headlines on both sides of the Atlantic in the late fall of 2002 as it became clear that the United States was preparing to go it alone in Iraq if necessary. Despite their final refusal to participate in the invasion of Iraq, in 2003 Germany found itself with “a two-faced Iraq policy: one policy

consisting of open opposition to the war, and another providing quiet structural support for the United States military campaign”⁴⁹ through the use of airbases and infrastructure that supported the war effort.

Many have debated the long-term impact of Germany’s refusal to participate in the war, and some agree with Stephen Szabo who declared that “if the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin wall and the unification of Germany, the post-Cold War period in the German-United States relationship ended with the war in Iraq...Humpty Dumpty had fallen and the pieces could not be put together again.”⁵⁰ On this point, it seems easy to forget that opposition to the United States’ unilateral action against Iraq was widespread in Europe and many other parts of the world, and to many “the large scale (European) consensus that gave the opposition its underpinning amounted to the rebirth of Europe as a counterforce to United States policies.”⁵¹ Put another way, elites and politicians in France and Germany felt that “Europe must use its weight on the international level and within the framework of the United Nations to balance against the hegemonic unilateralism of the United States.”⁵² This point was raised again almost ten years later when the world again contemplated military action against another authoritarian regime, albeit it one that was playing a more overt role in killing civilians.

NATO Intervention in Libya

In early March, 2011, following weeks of fighting a rebel insurrection, the Libyan government threatened to strike forcefully against rebel positions holding Benghazi. The United Nations Security Council began to mull options to deter the Libyan military from the slaughter of civilians that seemed likely to ensue, and subsequently approved Security Resolution 1973, establishing a no fly zone over Libya and authorizing “Member States...to take all necessary measures...to protect civilians and civilian populated areas.”⁵³ At the time, Germany occupied

a seat on the UNSC, but abstained from the final vote that approved UNSCR 1973, and did not participate directly in the intervention. This abstention and refusal to participate in Libya led to widespread condemnation in the EU, as “critics....deplored the absence of German contributions to Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR in Libya.”⁵⁴ At first glance, this behavior is puzzling because it does not seem consistent with German support of the UNSCR that was used to defend Kosovo in 1999 largely on the basis of responsibility to protect (R2P), and a desire to accommodate allies.

The abstention on Libya clearly illustrates the “skepticism by German politicians and the public towards the use of force,”⁵⁵ while yielding great insight into the complex domestic and political considerations Germany confronts when contemplating the use of force, however the story on the German abstention is more nuanced than many in the international community realized. This confluence of events is also highly relevant to the thesis that is being developed regarding factors that conspire to frustrate efforts to change German defense policy.

Brockmeir’s analysis of events that unfolded in the days just prior to the vote on UNSCR 1973 support her assertion that the German abstention in voting for the no fly zone was the result of a complex confluence of events, some resulting from conscious decisions on both sides of the Atlantic, and others of pure happenstance and poor timing. She concludes that the German abstention was not simply a matter of Germany dissenting to oppose the use of military force by NATO forces “out of area”; the causes for the abstention and internal dissent ran much deeper than the typical German pacifist storylines.

Brockmeir discusses five contributing factors that, taken together, seem unlikely to indicate that the Libyan abstention marked a true “strategic repositioning of German foreign policy.”⁵⁶ The factors that influenced the debate included: (1) doubts about the French and

British motivations; with Germany suspecting that each leader was striving to bolster foreign policy credentials, and/or act assertively on the world stage, (2) a very late shift in the United States position initially opposing a no-fly zone, (3) contested verbiage in UNSCR 1973 that allowed for member states to use force to protect civilians, rather than simply relying on a passive no-fly zone, (4) a greater than usual reluctance of the government to ask the parliament for a mandate in support of using force due to upcoming regional elections, and (5) Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, who possessed a rather strong pacifist orientation.⁵⁷ These factors illustrate the complexity of the German calculus regarding decisions like this, but it is also important to note that Chancellor Merkel assured British Prime Minister David Cameron that if Germany was the swing vote on the UNSCR on Libya, the nation would vote “yes”, illustrating the pragmatic nature of the Chancellor Merkel⁵⁸.

The bottom line regarding the German abstention was that many German politicians felt that their nation had supported their allies as much as they “could up to the point that would require a Bundestag mandate,” while the difficulty for NATO, and the allies was that “no one is sure where exactly that point is.”⁵⁹ The most troubling elements of the German abstention were poll numbers that showed that the majority of the German public and parliamentarians were in *favor* of an intervention, but also in favor of withholding German troops from the conflict, an issue that will be discussed further in a following discussion, supporting the central assertion that the German position on the use of force is unlikely to change anytime soon because of paradoxes like this.

How Past Events Influence Recent Dialogue

The nature of this discussion is not intended to minimize Germany’s contributions to multi-national missions the world over; in 2011 Germany forces were involved in more than ten

overseas missions, ranging from Kosovo, to Afghanistan, Bosnia, Lebanon, the Mediterranean, and the Horn of Africa.⁶⁰ Germany has dutifully supported its allies, bi-lateral, and multilateral defense agreements worldwide, while also consistently resisting the use of direct military force outside their borders. In the nearly 25 years since the Cold War ended and Germany was reunited, Germany's foreign and defense policies evolved in subtle ways that allowed their forces to participate in armed conflicts, but it was apparent to the international community that the internal Germany debate on when and where to use their military had nuances that did not exist for most other European nations. This has created a tension between Germany and NATO allies regarding when and how Germany would be expected to support "out of area" operations as Germany begins to fully debate the tension between their history and the merits of possessing a modern and capable military.

Roots of Military Security Dissonance in the European Union

A 2012 Atlantic Council report observed that "Germany is an economic powerhouse, but a second-rate political and military power."⁶¹ This sentiment has taken root in both the European Union and within many NATO countries who "have thus wondered (increasingly aloud) whether Germany has become the 'new France', blockading new initiatives proposed by others, while not contributing constructively to the development of the alliance."⁶² One of the cornerstone assertions that place German political elites at odds with many members of the EU has been their reluctance to view NATO as suitable for handling security conflicts outside the borders of the EU. The problem is that "for a number of allies, notably the United States, it makes no sense to have a regional alliance in a security environment that is seen as increasingly global."⁶³ This idea runs counter to the "German mainstream (who) has never bought into this line of reasoning and is thus not willing to draw consequences from this assessment."⁶⁴ Accordingly, with an

orientation that rejects the notion that there is a justification for a NATO with a global orientation, Germany is solidly against the idea of a “Global NATO or a Concert of Democracies”⁶⁵

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has been rather clear on this point, commenting to the Bundestag in 2009 that “I cannot see a global NATO. The alliance is and remains primarily concentrated on the collective security of the North Atlantic partners...if need be it must also guarantee security outside the area of the alliance. However it does not mean that states around the globe can become members, but rather that the member states from the transatlantic area must fulfill this guarantee.”⁶⁶ “More recently, the (German) government’s refusal to even start discussing the situation in Syria within the North Atlantic Council raised eyebrows.”⁶⁷

Additionally, many have viewed Chancellor Merkel’s handling of the Russian seizure of Crimea with disappointment, seeking a more strongly worded rebuke of Russian President Vladimir Putin, although some of the nuances of the German response to Crimea will be discussed later in this work.

Changes in the Air?

In recent months, and even prior to the Russian seizure of Crimea, there was an emerging sense among policy experts that the tone of the German dialogue towards engagement with the West and NATO was changing as Germany contemplates a more prominent role in ensuring the security of the European Union. This notion gained steam after German president Joachim Gauck recently made comments calling for changes in the German outlook on national security issues. Gauck’s February 2014 comments at the Munich Security Conference made the argument that “Germany is the most populous state in Europe, by far the continent’s most stable and prosperous economy....a dominant voice in the European Union (and) as a trading state, its

freedom, wealth, and influence result from the existing liberal international order, however for six decades Germany contributed relatively little to upholding that order, especially in terms of military force.”⁶⁸ Mr. Gauck also admonished “those of his countrymen who use Germany’s guilt for its past as a shield for laziness or a desire to disengage from the world”.⁶⁹ Whether his calls will resonate with Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Bundestag, Bundesrat, and the German electorate, is to be determined. Additionally, “President Gauck’s (recent) speech was met with harsh criticism by the parliamentary opposition of the Green Party and Leftists (that) fear a ‘militarization’ of German foreign policy and argue that the West’s recent military engagements in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq failed to produce the desired political results.”⁷⁰

A Fundamental Shift in German Military Security Posture? Unlikely.

President Gauck’s comments come amidst (or perhaps due to) an international sense that the United States “is sending clear signals that their engagement in the world will be more selective in (the) future,”⁷¹ Despite what may be the emergence of a fledgling German national security policy orientation that favors a more prominent role in regional and NATO defense policies, Germany faces several strong and persistent social orientations and political challenges that make it very unlikely that seismic changes will occur in German military defense policy. These factors include: (1) the strength of the civilian power paradigm that seeks broad consensus and does not permit the government to employ the military absent a mandate from the parliament, (2) the German population’s lack of will to support military interventions or fund a larger German defense force that would be necessary for a more assertive national defense policy, and (3) the small size and funding level of the Bundeswehr, with minimal prospects for additional funding in the near term. These factors will be discussed further below, and all support

the assertion that other nations and NATO partners should not expect major changes in the German orientation on military force despite what German officials are saying publicly

The Civilian Power Paradigm and the Role of Parliamentary Reservation

Few nations can fully empathize with the German zeitgeist of the post-World War II era, nor appreciate the heights to which their economy has soared in the last 70 years despite the challenges they faced immediately following the end of World War II. The re-emergence of Germany as the great economic power that it is today is a testament to several generations of political leaders that allowed the German people to reassert their position in the global community amidst a sense of profound regret for past transgressions, while inspiring German ambitions that were tempered with humility and restraint. Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder was the first to implore Germans to “trust themselves as a democratic nation committed to universal values” that should not “feel superior but also not inferior to any other nation.”⁷² It was Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer that “led Germany out of its ‘culture of restraint,’ replacing a predominant civilian power paradigm of German foreign policy with a new ‘culture of realpolitik’ more in tune with the self-confidence of the new generation of leadership.”⁷³

However, the deeply ingrained nature of the civilian power paradigm has proved very difficult to overcome and must be considered one of the primary reasons that a fundamental shift in German military security policy orientation is unlikely. From its inception, Germany’s civilian power paradigm conceived of “the army...(as) a new type of institution, created not so much to wage wars but to atone for the past and make its repeat impossible.”⁷⁴ In 2009, Dettke presciently observed that “in several crisis situations, the civilian power paradigm has encouraged German political leaders to look the other way...in the future, it could discourage a willingness to lead, even in cases where there was a legitimate mandate and Germany had the

means to act militarily.”⁷⁵ Indeed, it seems that German public “support for any foreign mission evaporates as soon as there is violence, whether it is Germans or others doing the shooting.”⁷⁶

This reluctance to employ force is not limited to the citizenry alone; during the Libyan crisis, Foreign Minister Westerwelle emphasized the role of the Bundestag in approving any use of the German military. This is an element of the civilian power paradigm that needs to be fully appreciated because, as Westerwelle pointed out the day after the German abstention vote on UNSCR 1973, “every intervention by our Bundeswehr would have to be mandated by this House (Bundestag)...we have a parliamentary army, not a government army.”⁷⁷ During the Libyan crisis President Obama generated a lot of criticism for the decision to intervene in Libya “without properly consulting Congress”, a situation that would have been impossible in Germany because the Bundestag must authorize every military intervention.⁷⁸ The main point, and the one that drives home the value of consensus in the civilian power paradigm is that “the Bundestag has never rejected a mandate for a military intervention put before it for a vote by the government...a reflection of the fact that previous governments have been very careful to ensure sufficient support for any proposal before submitting it to a vote, aiming for broad cross-party support for any use of German military force.”⁷⁹

In the case of the Libyan conflict in 2011, the German foreign and defense ministers shared a feeling that the German government would not have been able to secure the Bundestag’s authorization to commit forces, potentially forcing an embarrassing defeat that could have imperiled the coalition government. Subsequently, a German defense official recently wondered “who is going to share assets with Germany if there is no guarantee that the minute that they are actually needed Berlins says, ‘sorry, this is too dangerous’”.⁸⁰ Germany’s abstention on Libya is the clearest example that in the future, even in the presence of a UN

resolution, and a codified UN responsibility to protect, Germany is unlikely to commit forces for interventions outside the EU, which significantly undermines NATO planning efforts for future conflicts while also inducing second-order effects.

Lack of Public Support for Policy Changes

While Germany's leaders publicly assert their desire for changes in military foreign policy, it does not mean that the German electorate supports the type of major changes that President Gauck or Chancellor Merkel advocate. There is broad opposition to the types of missions that have surfaced in recent years, and "a recent poll found that more than 60% of the German public opposes increased military missions abroad."⁸¹ In March 2011, polls taken during the Libyan crisis revealed the confounding "gap between words and deed"⁸² regarding the intervention; 62% supported an intervention, but only 29% thought that Germany should contribute forces to such an intervention, while 56% supported the German abstention on UNSCR 1973. International criticism of the abstention was broad and sharp, with "the Germany policy described as 'chaotic', 'disastrous', 'cowardly', and a 'historic mistake'".⁸³ Although subject to debate, the "central criticism of the German abstention was that the Federal Republic had isolated itself among its allies, sided with such powers as Russia and China and damaged relations with the most important partners in NATO and EU,"⁸⁴ none of which seemed to faze the German electorate, with one exception.

Since 2011, the debate in Germany regarding the nation's R2P has been robust, with both the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) "introducing motions in Parliament that ask the Government to do more to support the emerging norm."⁸⁵ Part of this debate has centered on the question of how Germany could support operations against Serbia in Kosovo in 1999 under the R2P banner, but not support the Libyan intervention? German policy makers

cited the fact that Kosovo was much closer to Germany, and the role that the Srebrenica genocide played in jarring the German conscience to oppose any further Serbian violence towards civilians.⁸⁶ These factors help explain the German decision, but as the public debate churns on, they should also concern NATO and EU policymakers, who must consider that a UN mandate to protect civilians is alone insufficient to compel a German contribution to future interventions because there is little debate that the German government had access to the same information that led NATO allies to conclude that Libyan civilians in Benghazi were in imminent danger.⁸⁷ The difference was in “Berlin’s increased sensitivity to the potential costs of an intervention”⁸⁸, which led many to conclude that “had it been left to the German political class and public to make the ultimate decision, Gaddafi’s forces would have likely massacred the citizens of Benghazi in March 2011.”⁸⁹

The parallels between the Kosovo intervention and Libya are instructive for those who wonder what level of support can be expected from Germany during future “out of area” conflicts. The conflict in Libya has illustrated that “there are (still) significant differences between Germany and the other European states and the United States in terms of the willingness to use force abroad to prevent mass atrocities.”⁹⁰ To many other NATO countries it seems that Germany “must accept that they sometimes have to defend others,” admittedly “not easy for militant pacifists.”⁹¹ It remains to be seen whether the public will support any major changes in the government’s willingness to protect civilians outside the EU, but the lack of support for the Libyan intervention seems a powerful indicator that the status quo regarding Germany’s reticence to use employ force outside the EU, even in R2P scenarios, is likely to remain for many years to come.

German Military Capability and Funding

Public support for using force abroad is one thing, but capability to project force is another and Germany's defense budget has been on the decline for several decades, "accounting for just over 1.2% of GDP today, down from roughly 2% in 1991...with fewer than 10,000 combat ready deployable forces today and less than 15% of the budget allocated for developing military technology and procuring new weapons systems."⁹² It is difficult to disagree that "if Berlin is truly serious about stepping up its game internationally when it comes to hard security matters, it will have to spend more to do so."⁹³ Taking a historical perspective, it is instructive to note that "when Germany was still divided, the West German Bundeswehr (federal defense force) was stronger and often better equipped than the present German armed forces,"⁹⁴ despite a smaller defense budget and a West German gross domestic product that was a fraction of its current size.

Germany currently spends about 1.4% of GDP (2009-2013 average) on defense, about 1% below what many other NATO countries are spending on their militaries, and the nation's long-standing reluctance to bring their defense spending anywhere near other developed countries is a leading indicator that they do not have the popular support to build-up the Bundeswehr regardless of the types of missions it may be tasked to carry out. In fact, the German parliament has plans to "shrink the army from 250,000 soldiers...to about 185,000 by 2017."⁹⁵

Many in the EU and defense officials in NATO countries have argued that "if Germany wants to be a more normal power willing to take on greater international responsibility, its armed forces will have to be strengthened, better equipped, and tailored to the growing need for EU, NATO, and United Nations operations that can maintain international peace and stability."⁹⁶

There is little doubt that “with the growing need for manpower to deal with an increasing number of conflicts, the EU, NATO, and the UN would welcome a greater German willingness to provide military forces for multilateral peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations.”⁹⁷ Many feel that “as a major member of NATO, the EU, and the UN, Germany is expected to provide the necessary resources for these organizations operations commensurate with its economic weight.”⁹⁸ This is one of the traditionally cited arguments that frequently surfaces during discussions of the German reticence to use force, but it has a trite hollowness that suggests that if German purse strings were loosened and the military enlarged, German foreign defense policy would fall into line right alongside the EU and NATO. It is important to understand the Bundeswehr is relatively small and underfunded because Germany has a deep seated wariness of military power; simply making it larger would not make it any more likely to be employed outside German borders. As discussed, the civilian power paradigm and the German people view it as anathema to use force outside their borders, a sentiment that is unlikely to change in the near future. Ultimately, increased defense spending in the future may be the surest leading indicator that German defense policy is indeed on the cusp of a major shift in line with what public officials are asserting.

The Ukrainian Question

This discussion about forces that have shaped German foreign policy, the nation’s historical reticence to employ its military in combat roles, and the prospect for changes in either of these areas based on recent comments from the nation’s leaders, would be incomplete with acknowledging Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in March 2014. The international community has rejected the Crimean referendum election to join Russia, and imposed economic sanctions on Russia. Against a backdrop of United States retrenchment

following two long and costly conflicts, Germany is likely to set the tone for the European Union and, if necessary, NATO response to Russia's actions towards Ukraine. Russia is Germany's 11th largest trading partner, but their economies are deeply interconnected by 300,000 Germany jobs that depend on Russian exports, and 35% of German energy imports that come from Russia.⁹⁹ Especially in light of the complex financial and energy ties between Germany and Russia, the question of what role Germany will play in crafting a strategy to contain Russian aggression looms large in the European security community.

Chancellor Merkel has spoken out strongly against the Russian aggression, highlighting the crisis as “the sort of conflict about spheres of influence and territorial claims that we know from the 19th and 20th centuries, conflicts that we thought we had transcended,” later “ruling out a shooting war, but not an economic one.”¹⁰⁰ Historically, “Germany has preferred engagement to confrontation when it comes to Russia,”¹⁰¹ and Merkel has already “distanced Germany from Washington's moves to place warships and fighter jets closer to Ukraine, thus affirming German pacifism.”¹⁰²

Merkel's perspective on Russia is unique because she grew up in East Germany, speaks Russian, and may “understand Putin's dismay over the loss of Ukraine” after the Cold War, all factors “that help explain the paradox of Germany's reaction to Russia's invasion of Crimea.”¹⁰³ The nuances in the German/Russian relationship extend far beyond Chancellor Merkel's ability to empathize with Vladimir Putin. Dating back to the Ostpolitik-era, many Germans feel that “peace in Europe can only be secured with Russia, not against it”, with many older Germans also feeling “a lingering sense of gratitude to the Soviet leadership for allowing reunification and withdrawing troops from...east (Germany).”¹⁰⁴ This German appreciation for the Russian point

of view is tempered by the possibility of “upsetting Eastern neighbors that are far more exposed to Russian troublemaking.”¹⁰⁵

In the end, Germany’s role in handling the Crimea crisis will either support or supersede the assertions that have been made in these pages. A strong German response would likely be the backbone to “an unequivocal commitment by the EU to impose clearly defined sanctions unless Russia stands down its military threat.”¹⁰⁶ Only time will tell whether President Gauck and Chancellor Merkel’s recent public statements regarding a more assertive German defense policy will be embodied in the German response to the Ukrainian crisis.

Conclusion

While it is true that “Germany’s national interests and, in particular, its economic interests reach beyond the European Union...they are global in nature and will keep their national character.”¹⁰⁷ It is important to recall that “Germany’s willingness to adopt the role of a civilian power with a ‘culture of restraint’ after World War II—characterized by multilateral decision making and a rejection of the use of force—was a rational choice both for its protection and to reduce its military vulnerability, as well as to guard against a return of nationalism and militarism.”¹⁰⁸

As new threats emerge and old threats stir, it will be important for Germany’s NATO partners and allies to understand that despite the rhetoric, Germany will continue to be very reticent to project military power outside its borders due to the residual strength of the civilian power paradigm, the relative lack of strength of the German military, and most importantly, the lack of will of the German people to make changes in either of the previously mentioned factors. If Germany’s political leaders truly desire significant changes in the nation’s military security posture, it seems that “what Germany needs is a broader public debate about the country’s role in

the world, but that debate has to be led by actual decision makers—starting with Chancellor Merkel and her ministers.”¹⁰⁹



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Endnotes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography)

- ¹ Tobias Bunde, “Has Germany Become NATO’s “Lost Nation”?, 1.
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- ³ Ibid., 1.
- ⁴ Jeffrey S. Lantis, Strategic Culture and National Security Policy, 101.
- ⁵ Adrian Hyde-Price, *Germany & European Order*, 76.
- ⁶ Ibid., 77.
- ⁷ Ibid., 77.
- ⁸ Stanford M. Lyman, *NATO and Germany*, 33.
- ⁹ Adrian Hyde-Price, *Germany & European Order*, 4.
- ¹⁰ Stanford M. Lyman, *NATO and Germany*, 33.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 37.
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- ¹³ Ibid., 39.
- ¹⁴ Adrian Hyde-Price, *Germany & European Order*, 78.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 1.
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- ¹⁷ The Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), and The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), “New Power, New Responsibility, 2.
- ¹⁸ Adrian Hyde-Price, *Germany & European Order*, 122.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 122.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 122.
- ²¹ Dieter Dettke, *Germany Says “No”*, 73.
- ²² Ibid., 72.
- ²³ Adrian Hyde-Price, *Germany & European Order*, 123.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 123.
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- ²⁶ Chaya Arora, *Germany’s Civilian Power Diplomacy*, 22.
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- ²⁹ Dieter Dettke, *Germany Says “No”*, 76.
- ³⁰ Sarah Brockmeier, German Policy Towards Intervention in Libya, 9
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- ³³ Chaya Arora, *Germany’s Civilian Power Diplomacy*, 29.
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⁴⁶ Ibid., 138.
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⁴⁹ Ibid., 11.
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⁵¹ Ibid., 10.
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⁵³ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, 3.
⁵⁴ Tobias Bunde, “Has Germany Become NATO’s “Lost Nation”?”, 1.
⁵⁵ Sarah Brockmeier, German Policy Towards Intervention in Libya, 58
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⁵⁷ Ibid., 58
⁵⁸ Ibid., 24
⁵⁹ Ibid., 56-7.
⁶⁰ Ibid., 12
⁶¹ Tobias Bunde, “Has Germany Become NATO’s “Lost Nation”?”, 1.
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⁶⁴ Ibid., 1.
⁶⁵ Ibid., 1.
⁶⁶ Ibid., 1.
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⁶⁸ Patrick Keller and Gary Schmitt, “Germany and the Spider-Man Doctrine”, 2.
⁶⁹ Ibid., 2.
⁷⁰ Ibid., 2.
⁷¹ SWP and GMF, “New Power, New Responsibility”, 5.
⁷² Dieter Dettke, *Germany Says “No”*, 2.
⁷³ Ibid., 3.
⁷⁴ Anonymous, “No Shooting Please, We’re German”, 68.
⁷⁵ Dieter Dettke, *Germany Says “No”*, 30.
⁷⁶ Anonymous, “No Shooting Please, We’re German”, 68.
⁷⁷ Sarah Brockmeier, German Policy Towards Intervention in Libya, 30
⁷⁸ Ibid., 30
⁷⁹ Ibid., 31
⁸⁰ Ibid., 55
⁸¹ Patrick Keller and Gary Schmitt, “Germany and the Spider-Man Doctrine”, 2.
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⁸⁸ Ibid., 35
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¹⁰³ Anonymous, “Disarmed Diplomacy; Charlemagne”, 56.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 56.
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